

Adolescent Mental Wellbeing, Substance Use and Chronic Pain: A Population-Based Cross-Sectional Study in Vavuniya District of Sri Lanka

FS Jabir¹, L Dissanayake^{1#}, T Shepherd², T Helliwell², L Selvaratnam³, K Jayaweera¹, N Abeysinghe¹, C Mallen² and A Sumathipala^{1,2}

¹*Institute for Research and Development in Health & Social Care, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka*

²*School of Primary, Community and Social Care, Keele University, Staffordshire, UK*

³*Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medical Services, Colombo, Sri Lanka*

#chinthana89@gmail.com

Adolescent mental health is under-investigated, especially in low-and middle-income countries. Mental health disorders that develop during adolescence often lead to behavioural problems, risky decision making, and may adversely impacted educational attainment and the establishment of social relationships. Adolescents experiencing psychological trauma, including those who develop post-traumatic stress disorder, also have an increased risk of substance use. The aim of this study was to estimate the prevalence of selected common mental disorders, hopelessness, chronic pain, and substance use among adolescents in the Vavuniya District, a post-conflict region of Sri Lanka. A population-based cross-sectional study was conducted with 585 adolescents aged 12-19 years. The study received ethical approval. Moderate to severe depression was present in 23(3.9%) participants, while the lifetime prevalence of any substance use was 41(7%). Chronic pain was reported by 135(23.1%) adolescents and 52(8.9%) had dropped out of school. Depression, substance use, and dropping out of school were prevalent in the age category of 15-19 years. The association between chronic pain and depression was significant ($p<0.001$). The most significant findings of the study were the low prevalence of moderate to severe hopelessness; 8(5.2%) among participants aged 17 years and above, and the low prevalence of depression;23(3.9%). Dropping out of school, depression, hopelessness, and substance use constitute small percentages in the study. The low prevalence of hopelessness and depression highlights the fact that these adolescents are resilient in the face of adversity. However, the prevalence of school dropouts also calls for a focus on academic attainment to promote better educational outcomes.

Keywords: *adolescents, substance use, school dropouts, depression*